



# *The Insider*

[www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski)

## Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

August 21, 2009

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

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### Mickey's Blog: Cutting Government - A Modest Proposal

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As part of my commitment to reduce government to reflect new economic realities, I have offered three additional important reform proposals. I will offer three more proposals in the next issue of the *Insider E-newsletter* because we can't continue to operate the way we always have. Times have changed and we must change with them. Below are improvements we could make to reduce the costs of elections, public pensions, and school testing. Next issue, I will discuss money-saving cuts to Preliminary Exams, Prescriptions, and Revenue Sharing.

#### **Election Consolidation**

I have proposed a bill that would consolidate all Michigan elections to twice a year. There are too many elections each year in Michigan. We should have one annual election in November, with a primary in August if necessary. Anything more leads to stealth elections, where citizens don't know the polls are open and participation is low. Having separate School Board elections in May can't be justified when less than 5% of citizens participate. The expense of these elections is a waste at a time when schools are being cut and the elections could be held for free by piggybacking on the November election date.

#### **Drop the DROP**

It is time to drop the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Plan). This program pays a bonus to discourage retirements among State Police after we just laid off 100 Troopers. How can we justify allowing state police to double-dip, collecting their pensions while they are still working, while we are laying off new hires we just spent millions of dollars training for the job?

New troopers average \$45,000 a year, and these retirement-eligible employees average \$75,000. Why pay extra on top of that to keep people from retiring? DROP participants are guaranteed a 3% return on their banked retirement pay. How can we justify such a guarantee when everyone else's 401K has become a 201K?

I have demanded that the DROP end, and that no new employees be enrolled in the plan. The department has refused. Unless the legislature changes the law, this wasteful and unjustified program will continue.

### **Privatize the MEAP test**

We should replace the MEAP tests given to Michigan schoolchildren with a professional, off the shelf test like the IOWA test. We could save \$10 million a year and also get the results back in a couple of weeks instead of 5 months, when they are useless. I have sponsored bi-partisan bills with my colleagues to eliminate superfluous customized add-ons to the ACT test we give to high school students, and to eliminate the test in social studies that is not required by the Feds. We cannot continue to spend tens of millions of taxpayer dollars on special Michigan-made tests when we could privatize the function, get a better test with quicker results at far less cost. The Department of Education opposes me. It is time we tamed the Testing Industrial Complex.

During this financial crisis, I have offered these and other cuts, including the judicial vacancies proposal. But cutting government is difficult. Everyone talks the talk, but few are willing to walk the walk, and cast the votes that make reductions reality. I will continue to fight for these reductions, and I will detail three others in next issue.

Do you have any suggestions on additional budget saving proposals or comments on the above? Feel free to share them with me.

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## **Mickey's Notes**

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### **PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN AUGUST 31, 2009 COFFEE HOURS**

My next scheduled coffee hours on August 31, 2009 will still be held at my district office but I have changed the start time to 1 p.m. and will make them a little longer. The office hours will now be from 1-3 p.m. For more information, check out the coffee hours section below.

### **DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES OFFERS \$20 FIRST TIME CAMPERS PROGRAM PACKAGE**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has launched a new "First Time Campers" program. Available at 15 campgrounds, the program gives people two nights of camping, vehicle pass for both days, and gear donated by Gander Mountain that includes a tent, two camp chairs, flashlight, lantern, camp stove, two fishing poles, and four hot dog cookers for \$20.

Fifteen state parks across the state are participating, including the Holly State Recreation Area in Groveland Township, Bay City State Recreation Area in Bay City, and Port Crescent State Park and Sleeper State Park in Huron County. The program runs through the end of September. For more information, please go to <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10365-213567--,00.html>.

### **ONLINE GUIDE HELPS DISABLED DRIVERS FIND FULL SERVICE GAS STATIONS**

If you or someone you know has a disability, then they can get help pumping gas at some Michigan gas stations. The online resource, [www.ThePumpGuide.com](http://www.ThePumpGuide.com), can help disabled motorists find full service gas stations in the state. To qualify for refueling assistance, drivers are required to display a state-issued disability license plate or placard.

The Pump Guide is an online directory of gas stations statewide that offers travelers with disabilities full service at self-service prices. The site was created by the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, a nonprofit organization. The Pump Guide's online program allows users to: search for stations by county,

identify stations near a specific location or by ZIP code, and plan a trip using directions that include participating stations along the route.

More than 900 gas stations statewide participate in The Pump Guide program. In addition to locations and hours, the guide also lists those stations that include car washes, ATMs, accessible restrooms, and other amenities. The information in the guide comes from responses to an annual questionnaire that the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans Organization sends to gas stations.

### **LOOK FOR THE SELECT MICHIGAN LOGO FOR BEST-TASTING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

People who want the healthiest, freshest, best-tasting fruits and vegetables should look no further than products grown right here in Michigan. Select Michigan, a brand identification program to promote Michigan-grown food, can help people find food produced in the state. The Select Michigan logo can be found on Michigan food products sold at grocery stores, farmers markets, and on individual farms. By purchasing this produce, not only will you be buying local food that's fresher, healthier, and tastes better, you will also be helping the Michigan economy.

### **MICHIGAN PROPERTY OWNERS CAN SUBMIT PHOTOS FOR MOVIE LOCATION DATABASE**

Anyone who thinks their property would look good in the movies can now submit photos to the Michigan Film Office for their movie location database. Filmmakers frequently come into communities and look for local homes, businesses, and other locations to use in their movies. Go to <http://www.michiganfilmoffice.org>, click on the Submit Location tab, and post up to 10 jpeg-format photos of your business or residence free of charge. The film office approves all submissions before posting them on the website, and reserves the right to withhold or correct any submissions. There is no guarantee that a submission will be used. If you have any questions, you can call (800) 477-3456 or email [info@michigan.org](mailto:info@michigan.org).

### **HELP IS OUT THERE: STATE AND LOCAL JOB PROGRAMS FOR JOB SEEKERS**

The recent Chrysler and General Motors bankruptcies mean that even more families will need job search and family assistance programs. There is a lot of help available for job seekers, but unfortunately many people don't know how to access these programs. I hope that readers will find the following information helpful. These programs are available for job seekers:

- Career Education and Workforce Programs (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth). For job programs for veterans, people transitioning from welfare to work, specialized job placement programs, and dislocated/laid off worker assistance, visit the website at <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1679---,00.html>.
- Rapid Response Program (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth): 1-517-373-6234. This program begins when Rapid Response is notified of a plant closing or mass lay-off, and helps people with their job search and new training they may need. Visit the website at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678\\_2665---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678_2665---,00.html).
- The Macomb County Small Business and Technology Development Center provides counseling, training, research, and advocacy for new ventures, new start-up businesses, and existing small businesses. You can contact them at [SBTDC@macombcountymi.gov](mailto:SBTDC@macombcountymi.gov) or by calling 1-586-469-5118.

- Unemployment Insurance Agency. To file your claim by phone call 1-866-500-0017. To inquire about your claim call 1-866-500-0017, and press 3. To find answers to general questions about unemployment benefits and to print forms, log on to [www.michigan.gov/uia](http://www.michigan.gov/uia).
- Michigan Talent Bank: 1-888-253-6855. This site lists new job openings monthly and allows people to post their resume. Visit the website at: [https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB\\_EMPL.EntryMainPage](https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB_EMPL.EntryMainPage).
- The United Way of Southeastern Michigan. The United Way runs the 211 Help Line which connects people with helpful services just as 911 connects people with emergency services. People simply dial 211 (or 1-800-552-1183) and use the United Way as their link to local and state programs. 211 can make referrals to agencies that can help with job training, rent, mortgage payments, and the cost of food or prescriptions. 211 is a lifeline for people in difficult situations trying to navigate their way through local and state programs.

### **MICHIGAN EXPANDS AUTOMATED TELEPHONE HOURS TO ACCEPT UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS**

Jobless workers who are applying for unemployment benefits can now file their claims 24 hours a day Monday through Saturday by using an automated telephone system at the state's Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA). The automated telephone system is now available from 7:00 a.m. Monday through 7:00 p.m. Saturday except the first Saturday of the month (the same hours as their online application system). Additionally, this recent enhancement allows workers to change their benefit payment option from debit card to direct deposit or vice versa at their convenience, whether it is at 8:00 p.m. or 2:00 a.m.

Callers can reach the automated system by dialing the UIA's toll-free telephone number 1-866-500-0017. The automated phone system does not have any UIA representatives available to help callers either before or after regular business hours and representatives are only available during normal business hours (weekdays from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.).

### **TIPS FOR PREVENTING IDENTITY THEFT**

Identity theft is a serious issue and you can take many precautions to help reduce the risk of becoming a victim. These include reviewing your credit report annually; never giving out identifying information in response to a unsolicited offer unless you initiate the contact; and when using the Internet, ensuring a website is a secure site by looking for an "s" in the address bar (https). You can view additional tips on preventing identity theft as well as what to do if you have become a victim by clicking on the following link to a brochure provided by the Michigan State Police:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ID\\_Theft\\_94764\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ID_Theft_94764_7.pdf).

Additional information can be found at the Michigan State Police Identity Theft Unit website, located at [http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1589\\_35832---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1589_35832---,00.html).

### **MSHDA ANNOUNCES FOUR NEW PROGRAMS FOR FIRST TIME HOMEBUYERS**

The Michigan State Housing and Development Authority announced the restoration of a federal tax credit program along with new programs that will give Michigan residents an unprecedented opportunity to purchase affordable homes through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). The funding is provided by the federal Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (HERA),

The first program offers new enhancements to MSHDA's existing Down Payment Assistance Program (DPA). Income limits have been increased to parallel single-family income limits, improving a potential homebuyer's ability to qualify for DPA loans. Homebuyers may also take advantage of the first-time homebuyer \$8,000 federal tax credit provided for under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

of 2009 (ARRA). The second program is the federal Michigan Mortgage Credit Certificate (MCC) program that has been resurrected following a three-year hiatus and allows a tax credit of 20 percent of the interest a borrower pays during the term of a home mortgage.

Two other programs have also been created under the HERA that has allocated \$10 million dollars through the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program to assist new buyers purchasing foreclosed or abandoned homes. This effort will assist communities across the state with elimination of blight and rejuvenation of neighborhoods.

Full details of the varying programs are accessible at the MSHDA website: [www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda). Once at the site, click on “Homeownership” on the left hand side of the home page. All eligibility requirements and program details are readily available.

### **ANSWER THE CALL FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE**

This summer, we are called upon to be part of United We Serve, an unprecedented national call to service to help Americans of all ages join together to address our communities’ diverse needs. This is a call to make service to others a way of life, not just a day-long, week-long, or summer-long event.

A new website has been launched to track volunteer opportunities, [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov). This movement is about more than just a single day of service - it is about committing to an ongoing ethic of service to our communities and taking ownership of the future of our state and nation. Organizations needing volunteers can register at the website to get matched up with volunteers. Citizens interested in volunteering can also visit Michigan’s volunteer website, [www.michigan.gov/volunteer](http://www.michigan.gov/volunteer).

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### **Coffee Hours**

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\*In response to requests from constituents, I have added coffee hours in Roseville and during the daytime. Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

<b>August 31</b> <b>1-3 p.m.</b>  <b>Senator Switalski’s District Office</b> (31513 Gratiot, Suite B) Roseville	<b>September 28</b> <b>7-8 p.m.</b>  <b>Senator Switalski’s District Office</b> (31513 Gratiot, Suite B) Roseville
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## Mickey's TV Insider Show

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Roseville**

Various Times-check local listings  
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

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## Contact My Office

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**Website:** <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski>

**Email:** [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov)

### **Lansing Office**

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Fax-(517) 373-3126

### **District Office**

31513 Gratiot, Suite B  
Roseville, MI 48066

Monday through Friday  
9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

(586) 294-0925 phone  
Fax- (586) 294-0985